

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O.11652: N/A
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SUBJECT: UMNO WINS BY-ELECTION FOR HARUN SEAT

REF: KUALA LUMPUR 2353

1. SUMMARY. THE UMNO CANDIDATE WON A BY-ELECTION MAY 6 TO
FILL THE SELANGOR STATE ASSEMBLY SEAT PREVIOUSLY HELD BY FORMER
CHIEF MINISTER DATUK HARUN IDRIS, WHO IS NOW SERVING A SENTENCE
FOR CORRUPTION. THE ELECTION OUTCOME, A SUBSTANTIAL UMNO VICTORY,
BUT CONSIDERABLY REDUCED FROM THE MARGINS HARUN ONCE ENJOYED,
MAKES IT DIFFICULT TO GAGE WHAT EFFECT HARUN'S CONVICTION HAS
HAD ON UMNO STRENGTH IN SELANGOR OR TO PREDICT WHEN ELCTIONS
WILL BE HELD. END SUMMARY.

2. ISHAK BIN PANGAT ALIAS SHUFAAT, THE UNITED MALAYSA NATIONAL
ORGANIZATION (UMNO) AND NATIONAL FRONT (NF) CANDIDATE,
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DEFEATED TWO OPPONENTS IN A BY-ELECTION FOR THE MORIB SEAT
IN THE SELANGOR STATE ASSEMBLY, THE SEAT HELD BY FORMER SELANGOR
CHIEF MINISTER AND UMNO YOUTH PRESIDENT DATUK HARUN IDRIS
BEFORE HE WAS CONVICTED OF CORRUPTION AND BEGAN SERVING A
SIX-YEAR SENTENCE (REFTEL). ISHAK RECEIVED 3,740 VOTES TO
2,229 VOTES FOR INDEPENDENT ISMAIL SEKAK AND 583 VOTES FOR
INDIEPENDING ER CHUE CHING. THE 1,511 VOTE MAJORITY WAS

CONSIDERABLY LESS THAN THE 3,010 HARUN ENJOYED IN THE 1974 ELECTION.

3. PRIME MINISTER DATUK HUSSEIN ONN ON MAY 7 HAILED THE NF VICTORY IN THE MORIB ELECTION AS PROOF OF THE PEOPLE'S CONFIDENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT AND OF THE NF'S STRENGTH. HOWEVER, THE NEW STRAITS TIMES (NST), WHICH USUALLY REFLECTS GOM THINKING, CALLED THE MORIB OUTCOME "NOT FULLY SATISFYING" FOR THE NF IN ITS MAY 8 EDITORIAL. THE NST POINTED OUT THAT ISHAK'S 55 PER CENT OF THE VOTE WAS MUCH LOWER THAN HARUN'S 76 PER CENT IN 1974, AND THAT, SINCE 40 PERCENT OF THE VOTERS IN MORIB ARE NON-MALAYS, A SIZEABLE NUMBER OF MALAYS VOTED FOR THE MALAY INDEPENDENT ISMAIL. THE NST EDITORIAL ALSO COMMENTED THAT THE ELECTION RESULT ARGUED NEITHER FOR IMMEDIATE ELECTIONS NOR FOR A DELAY.

4. COMMENT: WE ARE INCLINED TO SHARE THE NST'S UNUSUAL DISSENTING ASSESSMENT OF THE MORIB ELECTION RESULT RATHER THAN THE PM'S DISTINCTLY MORE UPBEAT PROTRAYAL OF THE OUTCOME. ALTHOUGH THE NF SUCCEEDED IN ELECTING ITS CANDIDATE, THE VICTORY WAS FAR FROM OVERWHELMING, DESPITE THE MASSIVE EFFORTS OF THE NF AND THE FACT THAT NEITHER OF NF CANDIDATE ISHAK'S OPPONENTS HAD THE ACTIVE SUPPORT OF ANY OPPOSITION PARTY (ALTHOUGH ISMAIL AND ER WERE RUMORED TO HAVE UNDERGROUND SUPPORT FROM THE ISLAMIC PARTY AND THE DEMOCRATIC ACTION PARTY, RESPECTIVELY). ACCORDING TO ONE ASTUTE LOCAL POLITICIAN, HARUN SIGNALLED HIS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SUPPORTERS (FROM HIS JAIL CELL, VIA HIS WIFE) THAT HE WOULD NOT OBJECT TO THEIR VOTING FOR ISHAK. HOWEVER, IN THE ABSENCE OF A FORMAL ENDORSEMENT BY THEIR HERO, IT APPEARS THAT A NUMBER OF HARUN SUPPORTERS CAST PROTEST VOTES FOR ISHAK'S OPPONENTS, PARTICULARLY ISMAIL.

5. MANY POLITICAL OBSERVERS WERE EXPECTING THE MORIB BY-ELECTION TO BE THE FINAL TEST OF THE NF'S POPULARITY BEFORE PM HUSSEIN CALLED GENERAL ELECTIONS. IN THE EVENT, THOUGH, THE SOMEWHAT AMBIGUOUS OUTCOME AND APPARENT RESIDUE OF ANTIESTABLISHMENT SENTIMENT AMONG MALAY VOTERS HAS NOT PROVIDED A CLEAR READING OF NF ELECTION PROSPECTS OR CLARIFIED THE ISSUE OF SPECIFIC TIMING OF NATIONAL ELECTIONS. NONETHELESS, THE CAMPAIGNING IN MORIB AND DIVISIONAL UMNO MEETINGS NOW BEING HELD THROUGHOUT PENINSULAR MALAYSIA PREPARATORY TO THE IMPORTANT UMNO GENERAL ASSEMBLY SCHEDULED FOR LATE JUNE HAS RAISED THE VOLUME OF POLITICAL RHETORIC IN RECENT WEEKS. FOR THE MOMENT THE VAST MAJORITY OF LOCAL POLITICAL OBSERVERS ARE CONVINCED THAT NATIONAL ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD PRIOR TO THE START OF THE MUSLIM FASTING MONTH IN EARLY AUGUST, BUT THE DEBATE REMAINS CENTERED ON WHETHER THE PM WILL CALL ELECTIONS BEFORE

OR AFTER THE UMNO ASSEMBLY.
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